

Senator Craig Pridemore

WASHINGTON STATE SENATE

49th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

SPRING 2006



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Sen. Craig Pridemore represents the 49th Legislative District, which includes Vancouver and southwestern Clark County.

Dear Neighbors,

My goal as a legislator is to help make Washington a better place to live, both now and for future generations.

We can keep our state moving forward only if everyone's voice is heard. This year I was lucky to work with a 16-year-old Vancouver girl who helped me write and pass one of the session's best pieces of legislation. I also appreciated hearing from many others: families and educators who are passionate about providing a great education for every student, and environmental advocates who are equally devoted to protecting Washington's beautiful natural resources.

Our state is a better place thanks to those who came to Olympia to share their views, or took the time to call or e-mail my office with opinions and ideas.

During the 2006 legislative session, we:

- Approved groundbreaking environmental legislation that will protect our air and water, including the Columbia River and Puget Sound.
- Passed a long-overdue civil rights bill extending protection in housing, financial and employment matters to Washington's gay and lesbian citizens.
- Took steps to make sure every child comes to school healthy and ready to learn.
- Expanded access to higher education.
- Gave more low-income adults and children access to health care.
- Passed a responsible supplemental budget that invests in our future while setting aside reserve funds for costs we can see on the horizon.

You'll find more highlights from this very productive session inside this newsletter.

One other note: In January, I started an online Web journal so that I could better communicate with people in the 49th Legislative District during the hectic days of session. I'll continue posting there periodically, so please check <http://www.sdc.wa.gov/pridemoreblog.htm>.

Thank you for the honor of representing you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Craig A. Pridemore".

Craig Pridemore

State Senator, 49th Legislative District

Thanks to our 2006 session pages for their hard work!



Deja Dunning



Julia Hamilton



Paris Heart-Hester



Louis Lefebvre



Molly McDonnell



Brent Worden

Education: Excellence for every student



As vice chair of the Senate Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education Committee, my focus is making sure all students — whatever their strengths and interests — have the opportunity to succeed.

Although much of the attention this session was focused on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), which becomes a graduation requirement with this year's 10th-graders, my goal was finding ways to help all children reach their potential. That means making sure they come to school healthy and ready to learn.

School Breakfast Program

An estimated 13 million American children live in homes without enough food. I worked to secure an additional \$2 million for the School Breakfast Program. Kids cannot learn if they're distracted by hunger. This is an important way to help all children get a good start each day.

Early learning

Did you know that most of human brain development happens in the first few years of life?

Recognizing that high-quality early learning programs are one of the best investments

we can make in our youngest citizens, we created a state Department of Early Learning. The department will provide up-to-date information on community child care and preschool options so parents can make the best choices for their families.



Family involvement

Many parents and students find it difficult to navigate the education system. This session, we took steps to help involve families in the education of their

children by:

- Setting up an education ombudsman in the governor's office and reactivating the Center for Student Learning to serve as a clearinghouse of information on education improvement and parent involvement programs.
- Creating a mentoring pilot program that matches students with adult mentors who will help them plan their educational experience.
- Devoting \$500,000 to award five grants to parent, community and school district partnership programs that will work toward closing the achievement gap.

Skills centers

Not every student chooses to attend a four-year college. We must continue providing opportunities in vocational and technical programs. To ensure students have a variety of options, this session we:

- Commissioned a study of how to increase opportunities for those student not adequately served by the state's 10 skills centers.
- Included \$4.9 million in the budget to help skills centers and other vocational education programs with upgrading and replacing essential equipment.
- Increased funding for incentive grants for school districts that are boosting skills center enrollment.
- Called for an educational outreach program about apprenticeship opportunities for middle and high school students, and authorized four pilot programs to expand student enrollment in pre-apprenticeship programs.
- Directed school districts to adopt course equivalencies for career and technical courses to give students maximum flexibility in meeting state academic standards.

Foster care support

Children who are placed in foster care deserve the chance to finish their education and get a solid start on their adult lives. We passed a bill this session giving 50 foster youth access each year to

Reducing e-waste:

A clean environment for future generations

Among my top priorities was a bill to protect our state from toxic electronic waste. Every year, thousands of computers, monitors and televisions are thrown away in Washington. Where do they go? Into landfills, where dangerous metals can leach into our ground and our water supply.

Based on the tremendous work of environmental advocates, businesses, charities and recyclers, I sponsored Senate Bill 6428, which establishes a collection and recycling program for "e-waste." It's a landmark bill that proves once again that Washington is a national leader in environmental

protection, and that groups with seemingly different interests can come together for the good of our communities.

In another breakthrough moment, we hammered out a deal on the ongoing argument over water rights along the Columbia River. I helped negotiate a bipartisan plan that increases water storage along the river for farmers and returns water to the river for fish. This was a balanced approach that protects our state's agricultural economy and our environment. I was pleased to help find a solution to this 25-year-old problem.

much-needed state support and transitional services until age 21 so they can become self sufficient.

Health care

Healthy children fare much better at school than those who are distracted with untreated medical conditions. This session, we moved toward our pledge to ensure that all Washington children have health care by 2010 by adding 10,000 slots in the immigrant children's insurance program, bringing the total enrollment to 14,000 children.

Washington Assessment of Student Learning

It's no secret that I do not support the WASL as a graduation requirement. I believe that it's unfair to use a single test to measure all that a student has learned, and I worry that it's an obstacle

that will discourage many students from pursuing their high school diplomas.

However, this session I did support measures that give students more resources and alternative ways to prove they've acquired the skills and knowledge measured on the WASL. The Legislature approved:

- \$28 million for remediation for students who are struggling with all or part of the test.
- Several alternative assessments for students who don't do well on traditional tests.
- An independent study of barriers to academic success.

Higher education: accessibility and affordability

For too many families, the high cost of higher education pushes it out of reach. I worked this year to open the doors to our public colleges and universities to more students.

I sponsored Senate Bill 6699 to offer

students some relief from skyrocketing textbook prices. Full-time freshman students at four-year public institutions spent about \$898 on textbooks and supplies in the 2003–04 academic school year. That could break the bank for many families.

SB 6699 and its companion House bill, which was signed into law, give students the option of purchasing just textbooks, without all the extra material that is sometimes "bundled" with them. The bill also encourages faculty and staff to consider more affordable options when assigning course materials.

Other steps I supported this year to improve Washington's higher education system include:

- Opening up 500 new slots in public colleges around the state in the high-demand fields of nursing,



engineering, computer sciences and math.

- Expanding Washington State University Tri-Cities to a four-year school, to open up opportunities in southeast Washington.
- Creating a new grant program to provide tuition and other expenses to 400 low-income high school graduates or older adults so they can pursue training in high-demand fields.

Listening to our younger citizens



Sen. Pridemore and Ashli-Marie Grant (front left) join Gov. Gregoire for the signing of Senate Bill 6415.

Imagine taking the driving exam in a foreign language. That's exactly what happened to Ashli-Marie Grant, a 16-year-old Vancouver student who is deaf and communicates using American Sign Language. She took her driving exam without an interpreter, and described the experience as humiliating.

I had the pleasure of having Ashli-Marie serve as a legislative page for my Senate office last year, and have known her for years (she served on the Clark County Youth Commission

when I was a county commissioner). Ashli-Marie brought this issue to my attention, and together we drafted Senate Bill 6415, which requires the state Department of Licensing (DOL) to allow interpreters in the car during exams for deaf or hearing impaired applicants. The interpreter must be chosen from a

DOL-supplied list.

Ashli-Marie testified before the Senate Transportation Committee on Feb. 2, with her mother interpreting. Members of the committee found her story so compelling that they took the highly unusual step of immediately moving to executive session to pass the bill. Gov. Chris Gregoire signed the bill into law in March. The lesson: We must listen to our young people. They have great ideas.

A boost for Clark County's economy

This session, we approved a bill that provides a tax incentive to advanced semiconductor manufacturers, of which we have several in Clark County. I was proud to play a role in getting this



bill passed. Gov. Gregoire signed the bill into law on March 16 at a semiconductor manufacturing plant in Vancouver.

This is one of Washington's very few tax incentive

programs with built-in accountability. Under House Bill 3190, semiconductor manufacturers do not get the incentive unless they make a \$350 million capital investment.

Our support for this industrial cluster will help it thrive in the years ahead. Semiconductor manufacturing has a big presence in Clark County and this investment will improve our economy and add at least 300 good-paying jobs in Clark County's semiconductor industry. Ninety percent of Washington's gross semiconductor industry sales come from Clark County.

Investing in our community's future

This year, the Legislature made mid-course corrections to the biennial budget passed last year. The supplemental budget that we just passed invests in families and children while setting aside a healthy reserve to pay future bills. I worked to ensure that the budget includes items that will help our community and our state:

- \$2.9 million to complete the second floor of the Washington State Patrol crime lab in Vancouver.
- \$500,000 for the Confluence Project art installations along the Columbia River.
- \$9.1 million financing authorization for Clark College to build a new work force development and corporate education center to address business training needs in the greater Vancouver community.
- \$400,000 for maintenance work at the Washington School for the Deaf and the Washington State School for the Blind.
- \$205,000 to continue studies on air pollution in the Columbia River Gorge.
- \$350 million — including \$50 million for the 2005-07 biennium — in a new Pension Funding Stabilization Account.
- \$10.1 million to help nursing homes care for our elderly citizens.

Examining our state pension system

While it may not sound like the most exciting chairmanship, I was honored recently to be named the 2006 chair of the Select Committee on Pension Policy. The committee makes recommendations to the Legislature on issues relating to the state's \$4 billion pension obligation.

We face some major pension funding issues in Washington, including how to handle the state's gain-sharing benefit, which enhances benefits for some state employees but could be very costly to the state. I'm pleased to take the helm of the committee, following in the footsteps of 49th Legislative District lawmakers Rep. Bill Fromhold and former Sen. Don Carlson.



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